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The man from Mozambique

Trying to play us for suckers?

As President Reagan meets with Samora Machel to legitimize his rule, the people of Mozambique continue to suffer.

They suffer not because of the so-called Renamo "bandits," but because of 10 years of oppression and mismanagement. It was not anti-Frelimo "bandits" who threw thousands into jungle gulags (euphemistically called "re-education camps"), or brought in Russian, Cuban, and East German advisers, exacerbated famine conditions, wrecked the economy, and kept development projects from being completed.

It was Samora Machel's Frelimo that created the crisis in Mozambique.

In our diplomatic quest for "stability," the United States is deluding itself into believing that Mozambique is moving toward the West. "Proof" of this movement is based upon a claim that things are getting better. During a recent visit to Maputo, here's what U.S. diplomats said:

- The re-education camps are now called model villages.

What about being able to leave them? Of course anyone can just walk out, but they have no record of anyone doing so.

- The 1983 forced resettlement of

thousands, called "Operation Production," wasn't really "forced"; people could choose where they wanted to be sent (kind of like a free summer vacation).

But in fact they had no choice. People were picked up on the streets and shipped to whichever location the government chose.

- Political prisoners allegedly number in the low hundreds.

But according to the State Department's own 1984 report, there

Samora Machel



were "several thousand" prisoners and no mention is made of any amnesties. (Maybe some decided to leave their model villages?)

- Sure, the government controls the media, but there is freedom of expression and censorship does not exist.

But there can be no criticism of Mr. Machel, the government, or political issues. And as for this restricting reporters, well, they know what to say and write, anyway. (The penalty for "freedom of expression" as we know it is a visit to a

"model village.")

- Frelimo has never sought approval through an election and has no plans to do so, although Congress has conditioned U.S. assistance on elections by Sept. 30, 1986.

You have to understand, the American ambassador told us, "90 percent of the people don't care about the vote."

- At the United Nations, there has been a "big" turnaround.

During the 1983 General Assembly, Mozambique voted against us 92 percent of the time; in 1984, it was 96 percent — but don't let this disturb anyone because in the "10 most important votes" category in '83, they went against us on all 10 votes, and in '84, it was five votes against and five abstentions.

In short, we were told by U.S. personnel in Maputo, we can be proud to know that "the general image of the United States is a positive one" and that Frelimo is "not an authoritarian, repressive regime," but rather one where the "top leadership thinks in terms of nation-building."

Well, in one sense, they are correct: this "nation-building" regime is not authoritarian. It is totalitarian.

And is it any wonder we have a positive image among Frelimo's leadership, when we excuse their excesses, apologize for their failed policies, and work to save their regime from the wrath of the Mozambican people?

In reality, Mozambique, is, not moving toward the West. Rather, Frelimo is simply playing us for suckers in a bid to prop up its rule. There is no ideological change of heart, only a toning down of the same old anti-West rhetoric.

Why is Frelimo making this feint to the West? Because after 10 years of rule, the only thing these so-called "nation-builders" can show is their own power and privilege in Maputo, a deeply fragmented country, and a wrecked economy.

Mr. Machel and those around him, of course, don't lack anything. While government ministers drive around in their chauffeured white Volvos, the people are forced to wait in lines

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for hours for goods — when goods are available. Electricity and water supplies are uncertain, education is ideological indoctrination, and food is scarce.

Intelligence sources have indicated that the Soviets have endorsed, if not actually ordered, Mr. Machel's seeking of economic assistance from the West, along the lines of Lenin's 1922 "new economic policy."

"Economic advice," however, is not all the Soviets offer. There are about 2,000 Eastern Bloc advisers, including several hundred military advisers, in Mozambique and another 2,000 Zimbabwean troops to protect the rail line to Beira.

The security situation, we were told by our diplomats, was getting better in the south. Privately, Mozambicans said the situation is getting worse. Frelimo only effectively controls Maputo, and its hold on that has been tested. (Three days before we landed in Maputo, Renamo attacked the outskirts of the city.)

We learned the Soviets were getting their families out of the country. This was not because of Mr. Machel's flirting with the United States, but because their safety could no longer be assured.

More and more Mozambicans are fleeing into South Africa to escape civil war and starvation. There are an estimated 160,000 now in South Africa, and some 1,500 a month brave mine fields laid by Frelimo to cross the border. The Frelimo soldiers' morale is such that there have been instances of deserters seeking political asylum in South Africa and Frelimo border guards offering their machine guns for a loaf of bread. It's becoming harder to tell the "bandits" from Frelimo soldiers.

Frelimo blames the deteriorating situation on South Africa, which has supported the Renamo. But this excuse is no longer credible. The South Africans are abiding by the N'komati Accords signed 17 months ago; they are not supporting the guerrilla movement. Yet Renamo is growing. And the people realize that South Africa did not destroy the economy or create the famine.

After 10 years, Mozambique is desperate. The people's patience has been exhausted. Frelimo realizes this, although it appears the United States doesn't.

Perhaps the most significant sign of this is the change in popular attitudes toward Mr. Machel himself. Until the past six months, he remained a revolutionary hero and above the fray. But that has been changing: increasingly, Mr. Machel is being held personally responsible for the hardships and failures.

Given this situation, U.S. foreign policy goals in Mozambique should go beyond supporting the status quo. Our policy toward Maputo is mistakenly seeking to legitimize, endorse, and prop up a Soviet failure, which "found" the West only after realizing that that was the means through which power could be maintained.

While there remain questions about Renamo, there can be no misunderstanding about what Frelimo is or what it has done.

Mozambique is still ruled by a one-party dictatorship which believes in Marxism-Leninism. There is no indication they plan on moving away from their ideology or their one-party state.

We should not be giving legitimacy and assistance to Mr. Machel and his henchmen so they can retain their power. That, however, is exactly what U.S. policy is doing in Mozambique.

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